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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 000235

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [KHUM](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: DEATH OF TEACHER FOCUSES PUBLIC  
OUTRAGE

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR SUSAN M. SUTTON. REASON 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) Summary. The death of a public school teacher working in the South on January 8 has prompted emotional press coverage and may be focusing wider national attention on the violence in the southern provinces. Along with substantial press reporting, the death of Juling Pangamoon has also drawn high-level interest from the royal family and inspired hundreds of teachers throughout the country to memorialize her. While the impact on the Surayud government's southern policy is not yet clear, this event could serve as a dangerously polarizing issue for many Buddhists, and possibly inspire public pressure for harsher security tactics in the troubled provinces. End Summary.

#### A BUDDHIST MARTYR

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¶2. (SBU) The death of Juling Pangamoon, 27, on January 8, came nearly eight months after she was severely beaten by several young men and fell into a coma in the southern province of Narathiwat. The attack was reportedly in response to the arrest of two suspected separatists in the area. Following a small protest by villagers calling for the police to release the suspects, up to ten young men entered the Ban Kuching Reupah School and attacked Juling and a coworker. According to press reports, Juling fought back and received significant head injuries--her colleague submitted to the young men and was less severely injured.

¶3. (C) The attack in May of 2006 immediately prompted wide media coverage, portraying the young, idealistic Buddhist Juling--who had studied in the South and volunteered to teach there--as an inspired hero who selflessly sacrificed herself for the good of the nation. Songs, portraits and poems were composed for Juling and the national media covered every change in her condition as front page news. Both the Queen and the Crown Prince made it known that they had sent flowers to her bedside and were monitoring her health.

¶4. (SBU) Following her death, Juling was given a royally sponsored memorial service in Songkhla. Her body was then placed in a flag-draped casket and flown by military aircraft to her home town of Chiang Rai on January 9, where it was met by a crowd estimated at 1000 people. Several VIPs, including PM Surayud, have publicly said that they plan on attending her funeral on January 15.

¶5. (C) While the violence in southern Thailand is a regular fixture in Bangkok newspapers and media programs, it has not been a topic that resonates for most Thai outside of that

region. For many people, especially in the rural heartland of the Northeast, the separatist violence often appears as an age-old struggle without a human face. Juling's death may be changing this dynamic. The media coverage of her death and funeral--along with the concomitant royal attention--is providing a new, emotional focus for the majority-Buddhist population. Hundreds of teachers in the Northeastern provinces of Khon Kaen and Buriram held memorial services for her this week and media message boards have become heated repositories of Buddhist anger.

#### TARGETING EDUCATION

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¶6. (C) As reported separately, teachers are often the most evident and vulnerable symbols of central authority in the southern provinces, and are frequently targeted as such, prompting sporadic closing of the schools. Moreover, given government efforts to use education as a tool to assimilate the ethnic-Malay minority in the South, separatists have focused their attacks on public teachers and school administrators. Some of our contacts say that these efforts are also designed to drive students away from the public school system and into the scores of private Islamic schools, which are allegedly used to indoctrinate and recruit new militants.

¶7. (C) While press accounts have listed Juling as the 72nd teacher to die since the resurgence of violence in January 2004, Ministry of Education statistics state that 60 teachers have been killed, with another 62 wounded between January 2004 and December 25, 2006. Victims of some of the most brutal attacks in recent months have been teachers; including the slaying and burning of two educators in Yala on December

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29, 2006, just meters from their schoolyard. In a sadly ironic twist, local press reported that suspected militants, in an attempt to kill a local health worker, accidentally shot and killed the niece of exiled separatist leader Wan Kadir on January 11; herself a local elementary school teacher.

¶8. (C) Since the upsurge in violence in 2004, the central government has struggled to protect teachers in the South with Army escorts and weapons training. Partially in reaction to Juling's death, on January 10 Prime Minister Surayud held a meeting with southern teachers and security officials to review new proposals to expand protective efforts. Among these proposals would be permission for teachers to openly carry firearms at all times; a poor stopgap to a larger problem.

#### COMMENT

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¶9. (C) Juling's death is a sad reminder of the failure of the central government to provide basic security in the South. It puts a human face on the suffering of the victims of violence, and serves as a reminder that the interim government has not made any significant progress towards solving the security problems in the South.

BOYCE